



## by

Brayton C. Case

Note: The following paragraphs are excerpts from letters of Brayton C. Case of Pyirmana, Burma, written between March 22 and June 24, 1942, to his son, Clarke, a Harvard Medical graduate now serving his internship at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, and are used with Clarke's permission. They contain interesting sidelights on the battle for Burma, and reveal the heart of a truly great missionary, eager to magnify Christ by his life or his death and longing to return at the earliest possible moment to Burma in order to build up the waste places and to minister again to a needy people. The division headings and underscoring are editorial insertions - *Jesse R. Wilson, Home Secretary, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.*

Dear Son:

Since the evacuation of Rangoon by the British, we feel pretty much cut off. We are still carrying on the farm and work around Pyinmana, although war conditions have been getting more threatening...

#### Refugees and Fifth Columnists at Pyinmana

The way we live at Pyinmana would surprise those who knew the old place as it was, humming with students from all over the country. Now we have barely ten students and only about a quarter of our regular workmen. Even that is quite a remarkable showing, with all other business in the town completely closed down. After the bombing of the town on February 19, one hundred refugees evacuated from Rangoon came to our farm. Nearly all the people of the town moved into the surrounding villages. Bad characters began to set fire to the houses and looted places in the town in spite of police guards. We all felt it was part of the fifth column activities of the Japanese, since fires appeared to break out in different places about the same time.

#### The Chinese Soldiers Come

Today some twenty-seven Japanese bombers flew over the town. As we hear of towns around us being bombed, we live in expectation of being visited similarly. About a week ago, I visited Toungoo to deliver a truck load of cabbages for the military, and heard a few days later that the captain who took my load had been killed in an air raid. However, the arrival of Chinese troops has stiffened the resistance in this part of Burma and given assurance that Pyinmana may not be taken. Nevertheless, all preparations have been made for evacuation, and women and children are living away in different camps. Many of the workmen come here only during working hours. The silence of the deserted city of Pyinmana has been depressing, and creates fear in the few who remain...

Providing pork and vegetables for the Chinese army in this region has become our special responsibility. Since the disorganization of marketing in the town, the villagers have been pleased to have a ready market through the army. I am able to serve the needs of the villagers and the army, and both have shown due gratefulness.

Last week I took my third trip to Mandalay since the beginning of the New Year. With the Chinese soldiers who do not know English in control, it will be harder to do as we please about things to be evacuated. This trip gave me an opportunity to get needed supplies. While we have plenty of fruits and vegetables and products of the farm, bread, butter, and imported things are difficult to get. It seemed strange to see shops open in Mandalay.

Thousands of Indians, driven out of their villages in Lower Burma by war and by the burning and pillaging of their villages by the Burmans, have flocked along the roads with bundles and babies on their heads, walking, as they said, to India. Evacuation officers are trying to gather them in camps to feed them and give them work. New roads are being opened up to India for the use of the army which will also serve for those who need to evacuate, but the number of people who want to use them is excessive.

We had a tea party for the Chinese general, and he appears to have determination and intelligence, as do also his Chinese soldiers scattered around watch-

ing every move we make. The Burmans have never seen such strict military control and want to run away. But it is pretty hard to keep on running and get anything to eat.

We wonder when American aid will turn the scales. With Singapore and Java gone, there will be more forces to turn against Burma. Sore trials are ahead, but we trust that the reinforcements against the invader will still save the day. The spiritual resources, as well as the material, play an important part in these operations. The character of the people of Burma is such that voluntary help from the civil population is not what it would be in America or England.

A. B. MISSION  
Pyinmana, Burma  
April 6, 1942

Dear Son Clarke:

My letter of March 22 is still in my suitcase. On that day we learned that the 200th Chinese division had been surrounded by the Japanese and there were practically no other troops between them and Pyinmana. The civil population was advised to evacuate at once. Prof. Dickason and I buried our dishes and hid or sent away to the jungle the few remaining articles of mine and started out of Pyinmana shortly before midnight and slept in a bamboo hut about ten miles north. Rutnam, our Indian cook, was the only other companion. I stopped to see friends along the way, telling why I was leaving.

#### "Vegetables For Victory"

At Yamethin we learned that many more Chinese troops had been rushed south and held the line at Yedashi about 60 miles south of Pyinmana. I considered it my duty to return to Pyinmana and help feed the Chinese Fifth Army. When I returned, on the afternoon of March 24, trucks were piling in to pick up the vegetables left behind, and the three overseers who still stuck to the farm were trying to meet the demands. Some of the British officials who had been ordered back were glad to see me return, as well as the villagers who had food products to sell. Cabbages and onions and other green vegetables, besides pigs and dry beans, came pouring in. The Chinese military trucks kept coming in to take them away.

#### The War Moves North

On Sunday afternoon March 29, Pyinmana was bombed for the second time (previously bombed Feb. 19). On April 2, Pyinmana railway station was bombed. April 3 the vicinity of the railway bridge was bombed. Besides these four bombings, we have heard that Yamethin, Thazi, and Mandalay have been bombed. This morning however, we heard the distant roar of cannon, said to be about 60 miles away.

Yesterday we had a good Easter morning service in the home of one of our English friends. I tried to lead our thoughts to the realities besides war on which our hearts may dwell and be guided with new victorious power: "Fear not - He has risen," was my text, Matthew 28.

Dr. Seagrave and Paul Geren and the Friends Ambulance group have been taking care of wounded brought in from the recent battle south of us. Also they cared for wounded in the air raids. They have now moved further north. Am trying to serve with the talent



Burma farmers bring in their rice

which Christ has given. "Christ shall be magnified in me whether by life or by death" is my prayer. My prayers are with you and the friends in America.

(City of origin censored)  
May 23, 1942

Dear Son:

When the Japanese guns could be heard from Pyinmana, the Burman village population around it moved away so that I could buy no more food for the 40,000 Chinese soldiers. Therefore, I left Pyinmana on April 13 and moved north to Tatkon, 30 miles away, where I established another food-distributing center, manned by our Agricultural School graduates. I was joined there by Dr. Gordon Seagrave with his sixteen nurses and Surgical Unit and the British Friends Ambulance group who brought in the Chinese wounded.

After being there about a week, the sudden break made by the Japanese through the British lines caused the Chinese army to send back some of its divisions from Pyinmana, and we were advised to move to the vicinity of Kyaukse. We therefore went to Kume, at the south end of Kyaukse District, and I continued to buy food for the Chinese soldiers and Dr. Seagrave's unit continued to operate on the wounded.

However, the advance of the Japanese, especially beyond Taunggyi and Loilem toward Lashio and west of the Irrawaddy, led General Stilwell to advise us to retreat further north, and I went with the Seagrave Unit to Sagaing, west of the Irrawaddy River, on Sunday April 26. The general retreat of the British and Chinese from the Mandalay area led us to continue to the vicinity of Shwebo. My work of buying food for the Chinese soldiers appeared finished, and I considered what I should do next. I was introduced to General Stilwell, head of the American Military Mission in the Far East, and he set me to buying food and other things they needed from the surrounding countryside. As Shwebo was bombed and the civil population had fled, this was a difficult task, but I did what I could.

From there I moved north to Wuntho where I helped the American officers investigate various routes across to India by foot. The rapid encircling movements of the Japanese at Mongwa, Lashio, and Bhamo made quick decision and action necessary. Then we pushed on to Indaw on the railway near Katha from which we finally had to make our jump across to India, after going in our trucks and then leaving them and dumping the clothes and other goods, which we could not carry further.

#### Over the Mountains to Assam

My experience of climbing mountains and setting villagers to work in our agricultural extension helped me to know what to do to get the company of 100 people across the rivers and mountain passes. Good fortune attended us on the two weeks during which we walked 200 miles across country in that the rain did not come till the last two days. Also I was able to get some sixty coolies from the villages to carry our food and goods. In addition I secured a number of mules. The wireless message which we sent across to India was also picked up. One day food was dropped from an airplane on a sand bank along a river down which we were floating on rafts. Also a party with food and carriers sent from India met us three days journey west of the Chindwin after we had been walking ten days. The remaining four days my heart was light because the responsibility of showing the road and finding carriers was taken away, although we still climbed to nearly 7000 feet over two ridges. All the people who walked across from Burma, including myself, have a lean and hungry look after the journey. Fortunately, I stood the trip very well, without a single blister on my feet. Only one morning I had a stomach upset by stuffing myself with too many army biscuits when the relief column from India brought us new food supplies.

Calcutta, India  
May 31, 1942

Dear Son:

I have reached Calcutta. After taking the train at Manipur Road Station, we were delayed 36 hours coming to Gauhati, reaching there Monday evening, May 25. I stayed with our Baptist missionaries three days, getting rested and fed, and attending to some financial matters with our Mission Treasurer. Dr. Gordon Seagrave and twenty more had come over from China by air. Dr. Seagrave has set up a hospital for the many sick refugees at this point.



*Sugar cane at Pyinmana*

#### General Stilwell's Proposal

General Stilwell has asked me to join up with him. I think they want to put me in as Chaplain. He said: "You know Burma; we like you, and we need your help. There will be plenty of work to do." I do not know just the kind of work to be done, but think it will be giving advice regarding matters about Burma and India, and helping to make people here understand America's attitude. When the American Military Mission of their own will invites me to this task, it appears to be a unique missionary opportunity to serve the peoples of this land in creating understanding and goodwill, and also in giving the missionary viewpoint as problems of reconstructing the future arise.

The missionaries who stayed on in Burma had a unique opportunity of service in the days when there were few to stand by and help. A number went into the work of caring for the large camps of evacuees and helping those bewildered people get out of the country to India.

#### The Lord's Song in a Strange Land

I feel like the ancient Jews: "We sat down beside the waters of Babylon and wept when we remembered Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" But they went back and built and built them a better Jerusalem than before. That is what we missionaries of Burma hope to do and I shall work here toward that end. Pray for the Christian friends left behind and scattered in the jungles of Burma with their lives in constant danger from the lawless people around them.

I think of you as having just graduated from Harvard Medical and starting your internship at Massachusetts General. May your mission of service be opened before you in God's good Providence. I am always proud to be your Dad. Whatever happens you know we can count on each other's love.

Mussoorie, North India  
June 24, 1942

Dear Son:

I am up here in the Himalaya Mountains with the Dickasons of Burma having a ten-day vacation. There is a large school here with many missionary children, and about twenty-five of our Burma Baptist missionaries are here. Most of them are getting into some work among the mission stations of India.

## Civilian Status with the American Military Mission

I had the opportunity to fly from Calcutta to New Delhi, where a new sort of life began. After being a half-starved and tired-out refugee marching for many weeks, it was a great change to be dropped into the luxury of (censored) hotels, rich food, and shops filled with all the things one could want to buy. At once I had to get clothes made, and at least some of these had to be of a military cut, like the uniforms of the military officers around me. From being an up-country jungle missionary running around among farms and villages, it was a change to be pushing around among military officers and political agents in a great capital city. However, the lifetime of contacts as a missionary opened up avenues of possible usefulness different from that of the army men, and my days were spent in following up contacts and unravelling different threads...

It seems best for me to remain a civilian on special duty for the American army. I am a missionary-at-large, and it is recognized that I have a useful contribution to make because I am a missionary. When I can be of more use to the Burma Mission, I will be free to leave. In the meantime, I think I can serve all the missions, as well as America in her time of need. The cordial welcome and personal friendship of the American officers with whom I have roughed it over many hard places coming across from Burma is also a tie that binds us together...

June 28, 1942

I thought of Mother's birthday on June twenty-fifth and wanted to continue this letter to you on that day. We celebrated by having a party of all the Burma Baptist missionaries in the home of Mr. and Mrs. D. O. Smith. About twenty-three were present. There is a certain understanding of each other's background with such a Burma crowd. When Mother was here and we had a home, we often had such good times with our friends...



*Editor's Note: Mrs. Case died in 1939.*

### Longing for Burma

On June 20, the first Saturday after my arrival, there was a conference of missionaries from evacuated and threatened areas. Although they have only recently come out of Burma, many desire to get back to Burma as soon as possible. They desire also to help in any way possible the Christians left behind. There probably will be formed a committee under the National Christian Council of India to give special attention to the Burma needs. When we shall ever get back to reestablish the work at Pyinmana, none of us can tell, but we still hope and pray and work with this purpose in view. There is no place where I would rather be. Many Burma missionaries long for their work in the same way.

I wrote a letter to Dr. R. L. Howard, Foreign Secretary of the Baptist Board saying:

"I would ask that beginning from May 1, 1942, I be loaned to the American Military Mission as a civilian on special duty. My salary from the Baptist Mission Board will be returned to the Mission during this special period of service from the above date. When I can continue Mission work in Burma or when it would appear desirable to sever the temporary connection with the Military Mission, I desire to be free to return to the work of the American Baptist Mission Society."

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